

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

----- 111246

O R 151145Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6640

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 12789

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SWEL, LE, US

SUBJECT: DISASTER RELIEF FOR LEBANON

REF: EMBTEL 12686

SUMMARY: DISASTER RELIEF FOR LEBANON PRESENTS MANY PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY.

1. SOME TWO WEEKS OR SO AGO WHEN I SAW PAPAL NUNCIO BRUNIERA FOR A TOUR D'HORIZON HE MENTIONED THAT HE HAD INITIATED ACTION BY THE VATICAN TO COLLECT FUNDS IN THE UNITED STATES TO FINANCE THE PURCHASE AND SHIPMENT OF MEDICINES AND RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR LEBANON. I EXPRESSED SOME INTEREST IN THIS, PARTICULARLY AS THE FRENCH HAD GAINED CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY FROM A SMALL SHIPMENT OF RELIEF SUPPLIES. BRUNIERA WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS TO EXPLAIN THERE SHOULD BE NO REPEAT NO USG MEDDLING WITH THIS SHIPMENT WHICH WAS PURELY PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE, AND IF THE USG WERE TO BECOME INVOLVED, OUR "ENEMIES" HERE WOULD RAISE CAIN, THE CHURCH WOULD BE EMBARRASSED, ETC., ETC.

2. YESTERDAY DCM AND I RECEIVED VLACHOLOPOULOS, PONTIFICAL MISSION TO PALESTINE REPRESENTATIVE, BUT WHO ALSO REPRESENTS THE CATHOLOC RELIEF SERVICES AND AS SUCH CONSIDERS MSGR NOLAN IN NEW YORK TO BE AMONG HIS BOSSES. VLACHOLOPOULOS (WHO MUST BE PROTECTED) WAS EXTREMELY

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DISTURBED, FOR BOTH ROME AND NEW YORK HAD BEEN IN TOUCH

WITH HIM ABOUT MASSIVE RELIEF TO BE ACCORDED LEBANON. THIS HAD BEEN INSTIGATED BY PAPAL NUNCIO AND "NEW YORK" WAS ALL GUNG-HO AND HAD IMPLIED TO VLACHOPOULOS THAT ALL THEY NEEDED FOR PL 480 ASSISTANCE WERE GOVERNMENT REQUESTS, AGREEMENTS, ETC. AND THEY WOULD MOVE INTO ACTION. VLACHOPOULOS, WHO HAS HAD A GREAT DEAL OF EXPERIENCE IN RELIEF MATTERS, WAS TERRIFIED WITH THIS PROSPECT, FOR THERE IS NO REPEAT NO ONE IN THE LEBANESE GOVT TODAY WHO IS, IN HIS OPINION, REALLY CAPABLE OF HANDLING A MAJOR RELIEF OPERATION IN AN EFFECTIVE OR HONEST MANNER. HE, VLACHOPOULOS, HAS NO STAFF AND HE SAID HE WOULD REFUSE CATEGORICALLY AT THIS TIME PERSONALLY TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE HONEST DISTRIBUTION OF IMPORTANT RELIEF. (I HEARTILY CONCUR WITH THIS VIEW.)

3. VLACHOPOULOS HASTENED TO ADD, HOWEVER, THAT HE CAN INDEED HANDLE SMALL AMOUNTS OF RELIEF IN THE SUPPORT OF SPECIFIC, RECOGNIZED CHARITABLE PROJECTS HERE, I.E. ORPHANAGES, MONASTERIES, CONVENTS, ETC. WHO TRADITIONALLY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH CHARITABLE EFFORTS AND WHO NOW FIND THEMSELVES SWAMPED BY THE POOR AND DESTITUTE AS A RESULT OF RECENT EVENTS.

4. VLACHOPOULOS CITED THE SHIPMENT THAT BRUNIERA HAD MENTIONED TO ME, SAYING THAT THE FIRST HAD ALREADY ARRIVED BY AIR, CONSISTING OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND SOME FOOD, AND THE SECOND WOULD BE MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND BEDDING. FORTUNATELY, SOME SANE INDIVIDUAL IN NEW YORK HAD STOPPED THE SHIPMENT OF MATTRESSES BY AIR* LAST EVENING AT AIRPORT I BUMPED INTO NUNCIATURA DCM WHO CONFIRMED WHAT VLACHOPOULOS HAD SURMISED, E.E. THE ARRIVAL IN BEIRUT OF A HIGH VATICAN AUTHORITY IN CHARGE OF RELIEF MATTERS WHO WOULD BE CONFERRING WITH THE PAPAL NUNCIO. HE ALSO HAD WITH HIM A LOCAL PRIEST WHO HE SAID WAS CHARGED WITH THE DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN RECEIVED FROM THE STATES AND WHO WOULD HANDLE THE NEXT SHIPMENT, DUE SOME TIME NEXT WEEK.

5. I HAVE JUST HAD A TELEPHONE CALL FROM PAPAL NUNCIO
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WHO ASKED TO SEE ME URGENTLY WITH IMPORTANT VATICAN AUTHORITY TO DISCUSS RELIEF IN THE LEBANON. WE WILL BE MEETING AT ELEVEN A.M. LOCAL TIME TOMORROW, THURSDAY. IT IS OBVIOUS FROM THE FOREGOING AND I HAVE HAD SOME OTHER CONFIRMATION THAT NUNCIO RESPONDED AFFIRMATIVELY TO REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL CATHOLIC AUTHORITIES. ROME GRABBED THE BALL AND NEW YORK IS NOW RUNNING WITH IT IN THE USUAL COMMENDABLE AMERICAN FASHION.

6. FOREGOING PRESENTS HORRIBLE PROBLEM. THERE ARE UNQUESTIONABLY DAY LABORERS, SOME SHOPKEEPERS, ETC. WHO ARE CURRENTLY HUNGRY IN BEIRUT AND POSSIBLY IN TRIPOLI. THERE ARE ALSO INSTANCES WHERE ENTIRE SMALL VILLAGES OR PORTIONS OF LARGER VILLAGES HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED IN INTERVILLAGE RELIGIOUS WARFARE. MOST OF THESE PEOPLE, I BELIEVE, HOWEVER, CAN BE HELPED THROUGH EXISTING RELIGIOUS CHARITABLE ESTABLISHMENTS. (IMAM MUSA SADR TOLD ME YESTERDAY HE IS SENDING DAILY TO CHIAH TRUCKLOADS OF BREAD, VEGETABLES AND COOKING OIL FOR DESTITUTE PEOPLE, I.E. SHI'A, THERE.)

7. NEVERTHELESS I HAVE NOT HEARD A WORD FROM LEBANESE OFFICIALS ON THIS MATTER FOR OVER TWO MONTHS. THERE

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O R 151145Z OCT 75

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INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

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ALSO HAS BEEN NO ACTION TAKEN BY THE LEBANESE TO COLLECT FUNDS TO SUPPLY FOOD, ETC. TO THOSE AFFECTED BY ROUND 4. A HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE WAS ESTABLISHED AFTER ROUND 3 BUT ALL IT DID WAS SHAKE DOWN BANKS, BUSINESSES, ETC. TO REIMBURSE FOR PROPERTY AND MATERIAL DAMAGE. WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING OF IT HELPING THE LITTLE PEOPLE. SO FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, THERE HAVE BEEN NO COLLECTIONS FOR DISASTER RELIEF AND THE LEBANESE RED CROSS HAS DISTINGUISHED ITSELF BY ITS TOTAL SILENCE IN THIS DOMAIN. FLOUR, MATTRESSES, BEDDING, COTS ALL EXIST IN COMMERCIAL CHANNELS IN THE LEBANON TODAY. WITH REGARD TO FOOD, ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS

IS DISTRIBUTION AND GOUGING BY LOCAL DISTRIBUTORS.

8. UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE, I PROPOSE TOMORROW TO MAKE NO COMMITMENTS WHATSOEVER TO PAPAL NUNCIO OTHER THAN REPORTING TO WASHINGTON. REQUEST, HOWEVER, CONCURRENCE TO FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. USG WILL NOT REPEAT NOT BE ASSOCIATED IN ANY WAY WITH RELIEF THAT IS NOT REPEAT NOT TOTALLY NON-SECTARIAN.

B. WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE SOME GOL ACTION BEFORE WE BECOME INVOLVED.

C. WE WOULD VIEW A LEBANESE RELIEF OPERATION AS SECRET

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AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT ONE, GIVEN WHAT WE ALL RECOGNIZE AS LEBANON'S HIGH DEGREE OF VANALITY AND POLITICALIZATION (I CAN WELL IMAGINE KAMAL ASAD AND THE IMAM FIGHTING OVER WHO GOT BREAD FOR THE SHIA, FRANGIE DEMANDING A HUGE SLICE FOR ZGHORTA AND KARAME FOR TYRE, ETC.)

9. WILL OF COURSE REPORT ON TOMORROW'S MEETING BUT IN THE MEANTIME SUGGEST DEPT CONTACT MSGR. NOLAN AND DISCUSS PROBLEM WITH HIM IN A PRAGMATIC MANNER. IN THIS CONNECTION, VLACHOPOULOS MUST BE PROTECTED COMPLETELY. I WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION IF I WERE MADE OUT TO BE THE QUASI BAD GUY. THE BEST THING, OF COURSE, WOULD BE IF MSGR. NOLAN COULD PROCEED ASAP TO LEBANON. I GATHER THIS IS MORE OR LESS MOMENTARILY COMPLICATED BUT THAT HIS DEPUTY, FOSTER, MAY NOW BE IN ISRAEL AND COULD PROCEED BEIRUT WITHOUT TOO MUCH DIFFICULTY.

10. I FIND THIS TO BE A VERY, VERY DIFFICULT PROBLEM, IN THAT FROM HUMANITARIAN POINT OF VIEW WE SHOULD NOT LET THE LEBANESE STARVE, WHICH MAY WELL BE THE CASE. AT THE SAME TIME I HATE TO SEE A MAJOR RELIEF EFFORT HERE THAT WOULD MERELY MEET THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEBANESE THEY ARE UNWILLING TO SHOULDER. WE ALSO WOULD HAVE TO STAY OUT OF ANY POLITICAL ENTANGLEMENTS. FINALLY, I WOULD HATE TO BE THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR KEEPING LEBANESE WAREHOUSE GUARDS, DRIVERS, AUDITORS, ETC. HONEST. GODLEY

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